23 1952

Florida

Florida Delinquents Rehabilitate In Jail

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.—Juvenile Delinquents in Florida are being rehabilitated with seasoned 'jail birds' because of over-crowded conditions at the state's training school for boys.

Although the state industrial school at Mariana is designed to accommodate about 400 boys, more than 500 are lodged there now, said Jere Stambough, chairman of the Florida Children's Commission. He made his report Monday during the last day of the commission's three-day session here in Jacksonville.

Stambough said the restricted intake at the school force many young deliquents to serve their sentences in jails throughout the state.

He declared that the public had been warned of the situation when past legislative budgets were prepared, adding that the state is now "reaping the harvest" of inadequate planning.

In another committee report, Mrs. Alice McPherson, superintendent of the Florida Industrial School for Girls at Ocala, was commended for her efforts toward and accreditation process for training schools and also on her preparation for opening the new Forest Hill school for delinquent Negro girls on Dec. 1.

The Forest Hill school, with an all-Negro staff, will have 42 girls in the beginning.

Mrs. McPherson was recently appointed superintendent at Forest Hill in addition to her duties at the Ocala institution.

23 1952

Barrett School Head Resigns

Mrs. M. J. Spelman Leaves In Tears

BALTIMORE

Mrs. Mary J. Spelman, acting superintendent of the Barrett School for Girls at Glen Burnie since March, 1951, has tendered her resignation, effective June 30.

The school's Board of Managers, headed by W. Emerson Brown, has stated that it will accept her resignation "with regret."

The Barrett School is the State-operated correctional institution for girls.

Brown Makes Statement

In a statement to the AFRO on Thursday, Mr. Brown said:

"We are very sorry. Mrs. Spelman is a very fine person, who has been associated with the school for quite some time. And while we have had various problems, if she feels for herself and the school she should resign, then we accept her resignation with regret."

It was made clear in the announcement that the change of administration is not occasioned by any incident or matter of management tending to reflect discredit upon the resigning superintendent.

Although tearful at the time, Mrs. Spelman would make no comment to the AFRO other than to state that she is resigning.

Replacement Plan

Mr. Brown said for the Board that every effort will be put forth to obtain as a replacement "the very best person in the country, trained in this type of institutional work."

The first consideration, he declared, is the rehabilitation of the young women confined at the institution.

Mrs. Spelman has been employed at the school a number of years, having served as assistant superintendent under two previous administrations.

Last year, when administrative changes were made, there was expressed community sentiment for the employment of a local person.

Mrs. Spelman was appointed acting superintendent under the usual State employment arrangement that stipulates a specified probationary period.

Maryland

23 1952 Mississippi

Negro Youth Set Free On Ruling Circuit Court Wrong Hearing Juveniles

A Negro youth who admitted stealing a $40 Jersey cow was set free Monday because he was tried in the wrong court.

Supreme Court Justice W N. Ethridge ruled that the Covington county youth, Jessie Wheeler, should have been sent to the youth court division of the chancery court for a hearing. Youth court hearings are civil actions.

Instead, he was allowed to plead guilty in circuit court and sentenced to the maximum penalty, five years in state prison.

Later Wheeler sought his freedom on a habeas corpus petition claiming the circuit court did not have jurisdiction over him at the time of his trial, and that the youth court did not now have jurisdiction.

Wheeler was 16 when the cow was stolen in May, 1950. He now is over 18.

Ethridge, in a 47-page opinion, traced the history of Mississippi's youth and juvenile court laws and ruled:

"The circuit court had no jurisdiction at the time of his conviction since he was then 17 years of age. The original jurisdiction was in the youth court division of the chancery court.

"The judgment of conviction under which he was held is void and the chancery court should have issued the writ of habeas corpus.

"At the present time he is 18 years of age so under the 1946 Act the youth court has now no further jurisdiction."

Ethridge said the basic issue was when the trial court's jurisdiction was established—when the crime was committed or when the defendant goes on trial. Ethridge said the laws fixed the date as of the trial.

The decision was a five to four division of the supreme court with Associate Justice Percy Lee attacking the youth court act as unconstitutional. He was joined by Justices W. G. Roberds, Lee Hall and John Kyle.

Justice Lee charged that the youth court act removed from circuit courts part of the jurisdiction and power conferred on them by the state constitution.

"In my opinion there is no reasonable basis on which to construe the section (of the act giving youth courts jurisdiction) as valid or in harmony with our constitution," Justice Lee wrote. "I think that its unconstitutionality appears beyond reasonable doubt and that this court should so declare."

Center Point Negro School Aids Borderline Delinquents

By ROBERT M. HAYES
East Texas Bureau of The News

PITTSBURG, Texas, Feb. 20.—Billy Joe, a wiry Negro youngster, was getting to be somewhat of a problem for juvenile authorities.

There was nothing inherently bad about Billy Joe. But his parents, who lived in Dallas, were on relief and the boy had to help buy groceries. First he took a night job as a theater usher. Then he lost interest in school and started playing hooky.

It looked as if Billy Joe was headed for serious trouble when someone thought of the Center Point Negro High School, near Pittsburg.

Center Point, one of the oldest Negro high schools in Texas, not only has an enviable scholastic record but is known throughout the state for its work with borderline delinquents.

LOTS OF FRIENDS

Dallas authorities promptly contacted Walter H. Harrison, superintendent, who assured them he would look after Billy Joe and try to steer him into the path of decent living.

So Billy Joe was hustled off to Center Point, away from the crowded streets of Dallas and its never-ending temptations. Here he could breathe fresh air of the open country, play games with other teen-agers and work on school projects that were both creative and interesting.

Billy Joe found, too, that he had lots of friends. Kindhearted Dallas people sent him clothes. A sympathetic Dallas policeman followed his progress with frequent messages of encouragement.

School officials feel there is little likelihood the one-time problem child will ever see the inside of a jail cell.

"When you bring 'em up right they'll keep out of trouble," says Harrison. "So far as I know all of our graduates have clean records."

LITTLE DISTINCTION

Billy Joe is one of twenty delinquents now attending Center Point High School. This represents about one tenth of the total enrollment.

They are quartered in two dormitories. Otherwise there is no distinction between the delinquents and the other students.

Harrison prefers to refer to them as "dormitory students," rather than delinquents.

"We don't use the word delinquent around the school," he said. "The less fortunate students are given every opportunity to lead normal lives, free from stigma."

The courts, juvenile authorities, welfare agencies, churches and distressed parents send wayward kids to Center Point and applaud its program. At present the dormitories have students from Tulsa, San Antonio, Dallas, West Texas and New Mexico.

Harrison serves as counsellor to the dormitory groups. They are encouraged to take their personal problems to him.

ATTEND CHURCH

Virtually all of the dormitory students go to church or Sunday School, though attendance is not compulsory. B. M. W. Floyd, a former member of the school staff, teaches the Sunday School. At least 25 per cent have joined the church.

Center Point, about ten miles east of Pittsburg, is believed to have been the second accredited Negro high school in Texas. And it is said to have been the first to teach farming. L. B. Cash has taught vocational agriculture since the classes were organized nearly forty years ago.

Center Point School was established through the efforts of Mrs. Christine Cash, who wanted to provide educational facilities for a growing Negro population that could not be served by other schools. For many years she was superintendent.

The present school plant, consisting of the two dormitories, a hot lunch center, administration building, industrial building and superintendent's cottage, is valued at approximately $100,000.

There are ten teachers and two domestic workers. None of the teachers has less than a bachelor's degree. Some have master's degrees.

Center Point began taking in delinquents about ten years ago.

At that time enrollment had dropped to such an extent the school faced the threat of abandonment. Mrs. Cash, who had devoted the best years of her life to the project, conceived the idea of enrolling students not wanted by other schools.

The experiment was successful from the beginning.

Only once, according to Superintendent Harrison, have the school authorities taken in a student too difficult to handle.

"Not too long ago a juvenile court sent a boy here who turned out to be unmanageable," he said. "He exerted a bad influence over the other kids and there was quite a bit of trouble. We finally had to ask the court to take him back.

NO HELP FROM STATE

"Our general policy is to turn down boys with evident criminal tendencies and confine our program to border-line cases where we can do the most good."

Harrison said the State Department of Education makes no provision for his rehabilitation program, adding that "we must look to the juvenile courts and other agencies and individuals for financial support."

"This is not a benevolent institution and we have no intention of passing the hat," he said. "Occasionally we get voluntary contributions, but we have too much pride in our program to beg."

Well-wishers frequently send bundles of clothes. The school is now cultivating a 4-acre garden plot as a class project and hopes to raise part of its own food.

PROUD OF GRADUATES

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Center Point program is Montie A. Barnes of the Dallas police department. Barnes keeps constantly in touch with Harrison and hopes some day the school can sponsor a Boys Town, open to youths throughout the nation.

Harrison, a Prairie View graduate who also studied at Kansas State Agriculture College, University of Minnesota and Bishop College, takes particular pride in the success of Center Point graduates.

"Many of them have become teachers," he says. "Others have entered the ministry and still others have taken up trades. But most important, a substantial majority of our graduates have become good citizens—respected and law-abiding."

Dallas Asked To Establish Negro Home

The Dallas Citizens Council Monday adopted a resolution calling on the city and county to establish an industrial home for Negro boys at the earliest possible date.

A 3-man committee headed by John E. Mitchell Jr. and including Stanley Marcus and Jerome K. Crossman recommended the action.

A $50,000 appropriation, half from the city and half from the county, would be enough to put a home in operation, the committee suggested.

County Judge Lew Sterrett endorsed the council's action.

"We've got to have such a home," Sterrett said. "It has been needed for a long time."

Sterrett said county officials would schedule a meeting with city officials to discuss the matter, possibly sometime this week.

County Probation Officer Sam M. Davis also said Dallas County needed a home for Negro boys involved in delinquency problems. Dallas County Negro juveniles now are sent to private schools in Malakoff and Pittsburg, he said.

An industrial home for Negroes similar to the City-County Industrial Home for white boys near Hutchins has been under study for a number of years.

The Dallas County Juvenile Board and other social welfare groups have frequently discussed and proposed such a school.

Davis estimated that between 25 and 30 per cent of all the county's delinquency cases involve Negroes.